

# Little-known African bird: Baumann's Greenbul *Phyllastrephus baumanni*

Lincoln D. Fishpool

Since its description by Reichenow in 1895 from a specimen collected in Togo, Baumann's Greenbul *Phyllastrephus baumanni*, has been recorded in five other countries in West Africa—Nigeria, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Liberia and Sierra Leone. In none of these, however, does it appear to be common and published records of it are few. This, coupled with its nondescript appearance, a large number of potential confusion species and, until recently, the lack of any published illustrations, means that Baumann's Greenbul does indeed qualify as 'little-known'. In the course of trying to assemble a summary of just what is known of the species<sup>1</sup>, I have, through the courtesy of James Karr, received a photograph of a living individual, taken by him at Cape Coast, Ghana in 1971. Reproduced here, the photograph will, I hope, enable accurate field identifications to be made. The photo and this commentary are intended to add to and modify some previously published notes regarding the separation of Baumann's Greenbul from other bulbul species within its range<sup>2</sup>.

As can be seen, Baumann's Greenbul is a typical *Phyllastrephus* in its lack of distinctive field characters. The photograph does show a number of subtle features, which are lost or masked in skins and hence not apparent or emphasised in literature or illustrations, but which should assist identification. Thus, the top of the head from the forecrown to hindneck is olive-brown and contrasts with the front and sides of the face which are grey with paler scaly streaking. Such streaking is lacking from the lores and the area immediately behind the eye, giving the impression of an indistinct darker eye-stripe separating the paler ear-coverts and cheeks from a weakly differentiated supercilium. The bright chestnut eye is striking. The bill appears surprisingly heavy with an obviously curved culmen. Bill tip and cutting edges are pale while the rest of the upper mandible is dark. Although not evident in the photograph, the lower mandible is much paler than the upper. This is readily apparent in skins. The extent to which it is of use as a field character needs to be established. The underparts are mostly grey, but the flanks and part of the upper breast are browner which results in an indistinct breast band—apparent in some skins held in the Natural History Museum, Tring (pers. obs.).

Baumann's Greenbul does not, despite some published reports to the contrary, appear to occur in true lowland rainforest. It only penetrates well developed forest at higher altitudes, such as on Mt. Nimba on the Liberia, Guinea and Côte d'Ivoire borders. Elsewhere, it is a species



Baumann's Greenbul *Phyllastrephus baumanni*, Cape Coast, Ghana, June 1971 (James Karr)

of gallery forest and thickets fringing the forest zone. Thus, the individual in this photograph was mist-netted in habitat described as 'charcoal subclimax', severely degraded forest with a low canopy, maintained in a stunted condition through the activities of woodcutters. Cape Coast is situated in the 'Southern Marginal' or 'Coastal Thicket' zone in Ghana, which extends along the coast west of Accra separating the forest zone from the Atlantic, the vegetation of which is dominated by dense scrub tangles<sup>3</sup>.

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## References

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*BirdLife International*, Wellbrook Court, Girton Road, Cambridge, CB3 0NA, UK.